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UNIONS BLUNT U.S. SALVADOR

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Despite intense opposition from the AFL-CIO hierarchy, scores of U.S. labor unions have taken steps to express solidarity with the workers and peasants of El Salvador.

Several international unions such as the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), the International Association of Machinists (IAM), the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Electrical workers have voiced criticisms of U.S. government policy on El Salvador. The real motion, however, is at the local level.

At the urging of both rank-and-filers and progressive union leaders, dozens of locals, districts and labor councils have adopted progressive resolutions on El Salvador. The organizations touched by this activity include: the United Steel Workers, the UAW, the Service Employees International Union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), District 1199 of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, the United Federation of Teachers, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), the Millinery Workers Union, the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians and more.

Mario Salgado of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador noted April 28 that union opposition to U.S. policy in El Salvador has mounted more sharply than it did during a comparable period in the Vietnam conflict.

"We see labor support as crucial to the fight against intervention because of the role labor can play, the power that unions have, and because of the role it has played in other countries," Salgado said.

For some of the unions, solidarity may end with the passage of a resolution. But other locals and districts have broadened support activity to include newspaper advertisements, educational meetings and delegations to El Salvador solidarity demonstrations.

UAW District 65 in New York City, for instance, recently hosted a delegation of touring El Salvadoran trade unionists.

In addition, numerous U.S. trade unions hired buses for the People's Antiwar Mobilization's El Salvador support demonstration in Washington, D.C., May 3.

The ILWU has displayed the most dramatic solidarity to date with the people of El Salvador. Last December the West Coast-based longshore union initiated a boycott of all U.S. military equipment bound for the Duarte regime. This refusal to load and handle U.S. weapons and supplies remains in effect today in 30 ports from California to

The AFL-CIO, whose 14 million members have never voted on the El Salvador issue, has applied high pressure tactics in an attempt to buck any progressive trend in the trade union movement on the El Salvador struggle.

"The AFL-CIO," says one trade union activist, "is desperately trying to stop any breaking in the ranks."

Last September, federation president Lane Kirkland dispatched William Doherty Jr., executive director of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), to a

packed meeting of the Central Labor Council of Santa Clara County, Calif. The AIFLD, which actively promotes the repressive land reform in the El Salvador countryside, and Doherty himself have been linked to the CIA by former CIA agent Philip Agee.

Doherty flew to San Jose to blunt the labor council's resolution demanding that the AFL-CIO "disassociate itself from the AIFLD." Some observers interpreted Doherty's remarks as intimidation, but the resolution by the AFL-CIO affiliate passed anyway. The resolution recommended that the "U.S. government suspend economic and military aid to the present Salvadoran government."

Appearing in New York City April 8, Doherty also failed to stop the formation of a Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador. The labor committee was initiated by leaders of ACTWU, AFSCME's District Council 37, UAW District 65, District 1199 and the United Hatters Union. Despite AFL-CIO lobbying, the group backed a statement calling for self-determination in El Salvador, an end to all "outside intervention" and support for democratic rights.

The AFL-CIO's stance is no accident. As in the Vietnam war era, the AFL-CIO and the AIFLD, which is funded by the Agency for International Development, has acted as a virtual arm of the U.S. State Department. One of the main purposes of AIFLD is to foster the formation of anticommunist unions in Latin America and elsewhere.

In El Salvador, in 1968, the AIFLD established the Union Communal Salvadoreana, a "peasant cooperative" which ardently backs the junta and has played a major role in carrying out the repressive land reform.

The AFL-CIO lobbies in the U.S. and abroad for the El Salvador government. The military junta has outlawed municipal worker unions, militarized all industry, prohibited strikes and bombed most union halls. In addition, thousands of trade union activists have been assassinated or have "disappeared."

POLICY

Despite the assassination of two AIFLD officials in El Salvador and the murder of thousands of workers and peasants by the military and security forces, the AFL-CIO continues to label the El Salvador regime as "moderate" and "democratic." It sees the Duarte government as "caught in the cross-fire between the terroristic right and left."

After the assassination of the AIFLD officials, however, the AFL-CIO slightly altered its position on U.S. aid. The action occurred at its February executive council meeting. "Any future assistance to El Salvador," the AFL-CIO noted in the March edition of its Free Trade Union News, "should be conditioned on reciprocal actions to bring domestic violence under control and to institute democratic reforms that improve the conditions of the workers." The federation did not even consider an aid moratorium in the interim, however.

The rhetoric on aid does not affect the labor federation's position on the land reform. "The land reform program in El Salvador," the AFL-CIO notes, "has the full support of the democratic urban and agrarian trade union movements, and is a major step toward satisfying the legitimate aspirations and needs of the Salvadoran peasants."

Varied dissent has emerged from within the ranks of the labor federation and among major U.S. unions. IAM president William Winpisinger issued a statement in January which read: "As trade unionists and Americans concerned with human rights for all, we condemn all forms of U.S. assistance to the current regime in El Salvador. Nonintervention in the civil war is the best policy."

"The fiction is promoted that the ruling Salvadoran government is moderate and interested in carrying out social and land reforms," commented Winpisinger in contrast to the AFL-CIO view. "The opposition is labelled as communists and linked to Cuba." State Department and National Security Council Latin American affairs experts seem incapable of learning that moderation cannot exist in a society as polarized as El Salvador's.

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